

Dependence and Independence: Kapingamarangi Atoll and
a Central Bougainville Community Compared

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The purpose of this paper is to explore a topic which has been given considerable attention in the academic literature, in the popular press and in conversation: DEPENDENCE.

The word has been in common English usage for years, but its application to political and economic relations as an analytical tool was first made by South American economists in the 1960s. Basically, those who write about "dependence" or "dependency" assert that the political and economic dependence of the less developed countries of the world on the more developed countries of the world is a result of colonialism and, in the post colonial world, foreign assistance and development efforts. "Dependence" is used as an explanation for why some nations of the world have not followed the expected model of capitalist development.

"Dependence," in this sense of the word, was first used as an analytical concept by academics working in the Pacific Islands in the early 1970s (see Ogan, 1973; Bedford, 1977; Brookfield, 1975). These writers, like those in South America and Africa (eg. Fanon, 1967 and Mannoni, 1964) have applied the concept not only to relations between nations, but to the psychological state of individuals in a colonial situation (Ogan, 1973) and relationships between small island groups in the pre-colonial Pacific Islands (Bedford, 1977).

I do not claim any great knowledge of the development of underdevelopment, nor the psychological impact of colonialism. However, I do see some of the

explanations presented in the dependency literature as useful in trying to make sense out of my observations and experiences in two island communities: Kapingamarangi Atoll, a Polynesian outlier in Micronesia; and Atamo village in Central Bougainville. I spent a total of twenty-seven months on Kapinga as a Peace Corps Volunteer and twenty-two months in Atamo village on Bougainville.

I, along with others who have spent time in Micronesia and in Papua New Guinea, share a concern for the political and economic future of these countries. The dependence of Micronesia on the U.S. was a concern of mine while there from 1969-1972, and it is a concern of mine now as I am sure it is of many people.¹

Micronesian writers in the 1970s (eg. Heine, 1973: 35-36 and 1977; Uludong, 1973) have bemoaned Micronesia's dependence on the United States. Heine, in a seminar on moral issues related to political status in Micronesia, states that "Micronesians are the victims of dependence ... (and that they) have never put themselves in a subservient position" (1973: 35).

I would like to share some of my observations on the question of dependency in the two communities in which I lived. This is not a detailed analysis of the presence or lack of a dependency relationship between Papua New Guinea and more industrialized countries or between Micronesia and the United States; it is, rather, an assessment of the relationships between two small island communities and the "world beyond." It is a brief summary of what I believe people in those two communities thought about those relationships and an attempt to relate these observations to what has been written about dependency. I will provide comments on the implications of the attitudes of people in these communities for the political and economic future of these communities and, perhaps, for the countries in which they are located.

¹It is ironic that people in the late 1960s and early 70s expressed concern over the political implications of dependence of Micronesia on the U.S. and only now are we academics "analyzing" the situations in these terms.

Kapingamarangi is a Polynesian outlier in the U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. The atoll has a land area of .426 square miles. The population of the atoll in 1972 was about 411, although there were at that time between 500-600 Kapingas living on Ponape.² The atoll population grew most of its own food (taro, breadfruit and coconuts) and depended heavily on fish. There was a coop and a small trade store with sales of approximately \$20,000 per year, of which about two-thirds was rice, flour, tinned meat and fish, biscuits and sugar. There were four full time government employees (all school teachers), and the total income from outside jobs was \$8,100. Copra income averaged about \$7,500 per year. Migration to and from Kapinga was by ship which called at Kapinga every six weeks to three months.

Atamo is a village in an inland valley in Central Bougainville.³ The land claimed by Atamos, when I was there, was about 27 square miles, much of which was mountainous. The island of Bougainville is a high volcanic island off the coast of Papua New Guinea. With "small Buka" to the north, it is about 130 miles in length and 30 miles wide. Atamos, like Kapingas, grew almost all of their own food but ate primarily sweet potatoes and greens. Opposum, pork, fresh water shrimp and almonds were feast foods, and there was very little protein in the everyday diet. A store opened in the village while we were there, but sales were only about \$200 per month. Atamos had access to a store at Manetai Mission eight miles to the north and to stores in the towns of Kieta and Arawa. Atamos produced copra and cocoa for sale with a total annual income of about \$8,500, much of which went to local processors.

²Kapingamarangi has been described in the anthropological literature at some length by Emory, 1965; Buck, 1950; and Lieber, 1968a, 1968b, 1970.

³The Atamo community has also been described elsewhere. See Hamnett, 1977 and 1980.

Movement into and out of the Atamo community was more frequent than on Kapinga, but there was almost no permanent out-migration.

Kapingas were contacted by Europeans in the late 1870s, whereas, Atamos had no contact until the mid-1920s. Although Kapinga, an atoll over 400 miles from the nearest high island, would seem more isolated, Kapingas have had much more contact with outsiders than Atamos. Kapingas were converted to Christianity in 1919, whereas most Atamos did not become baptized until after World War II. Kapingas have had resident Europeans in their community since the 1880s, whereas Atamos had no long-term foreign residents until the 1970s.

This background provides some indication of the similarities and differences of the two communities in terms of their environment and contact history. One more difference bears noting: Kapingas, before contact, viewed themselves as dependent on their gods for survival. They experienced periodic droughts which occasionally resulted in drastic reductions in their meager food resources and in starvation. Atamos, as individuals and as small residential units, saw themselves dependent on their spirits for success in feasting, pig raising and--in the case of potential political leaders--for followers. There was no single community as on Kapinga and hamlet groups of from one to ten households competed with each other, but survival was never an issue for those who lived in the Atamo valley.

Political and economic dependence and independence were discussed in both Kapingamarangi and Atamo during my stay with each community. The political status of Micronesia was being talked about in 1970 and 1971 on Kapinga, and the political status of Bougainville and Papua New Guinea was being discussed in 1974 and 1975, while I was in Atamo. When I was on Kapinga, people said they felt the United States must continue to take care of them. They said the German and the Japanese had looked after them in the past and, after World

War II, "the American Navy took over care of Kapingamarangi" (Chief Tuiai quoted in Emory, 1965: 27). While Europeans, Americans and Japanese introduced new goods, and provided shipping, health care and education, drought relief has probably played a more significant role in influencing the Kapingas' view of their colonial masters.

Prior to contact, the Kapingas' gods were responsible for maintaining an adequate supply of food for the atoll (Emory, 1965: 199-399). Drought, tidal damage and high winds were seen as expressions of the displeasure of the gods and food relief was seen as a sign that good relations with the gods had been restored (Emory, 1965: 200). The chief priest was held responsible by the community for drought and other disasters, and even after European contact aliki (chief priests) were deposed for failing to bring relief from disaster. In many ways, the gods have been replaced by representatives of the colonial powers. They not only provide goods and services unavailable before contact, but also give food relief in times of disaster. Kapingas have sought to maintain good relations with those who "take care of them," (Lieber, 1968: 2) and they do not appear to be bothered by it.

Atamo presents a stark contrast to Kapinga in a number of ways: It is a high island community with more than adequate land to support the population. Atamo has never been threatened by natural disasters and, prior to European contact, the population was dependent on its gods for success not survival. Atamos have had much less contact with Europeans than Kapingas, although I don't think Atamos have been any more or less exploited.

Atamos have been actively involved in efforts to create an independent Bougainville since the mid-1960s. They strongly resented the attitudes of Australian Administration officials and plantation managers prior to Papua New Guinea's independence (see Bedford and Mamak, 1974). When Conzinc Rio

Tinto began developing the copper mine twelve miles south of Atamo in 1969, Bougainvillians, including many Atamos, called for the independence of Bougainville from Australia. In 1975, just prior to Papua New Guinea's independence, Atamos and other Bougainvillians called for secession. The catalyst for secession was the National Government's refusal to give Bougainville the capital work funds it requested. Bougainvillians demanded that they receive the royalties on copper from the Bougainville Copper mine in lieu of funds from the National Government, or they would break with Papua New Guinea.

Atamos talked about secession as a moral issue (cf. Burridge, 1960). Their desire for independence from Papua New Guinea was not simply a matter of keeping the wealth from the copper on Bougainville for Bougainvillians. It was also a question of the inequality in status that the control over "Bougainville's" wealth by "outsiders" represented. Atamos have never been satisfied with being controlled by or dependent on anyone.

The contrast between the Kapingas' attitudes toward dependence and their relationship with the world beyond their community and the attitudes of the Atamos are striking. Atamos seemed to feel independence was important. Kapingas had either come to accept their plight as a community dependent on, and controlled by, colonials, or they had had a dependency orientation prior to contact and substituted foreigners as their gods.

Atamos joined other Bougainvillians in their efforts to break ties with Australia and Papua New Guinea. It could be argued that Atamos were willing to become subservient to a Bougainville National Government or a Government of the North Solomons. However, the ideology of independence was used in the early 1970s when Atamo and five other villages broke with the Kieta Local Government Council to achieve greater local autonomy.

I have implied that the attitudes of Atamos and those of Kapingas toward

dependence and independence are a result of differences in their ecological vulnerability. The Kapingas are in an environment which produces adequate food for a small population, but the atoll is subject to natural disaster. The Atamos live in an abundant environment and are not subject to fluctuations in their food supply. While this may be an over simplification, it appears there is a relationship between ecological vulnerability and attitudes toward dependence.

The two communities have had very different colonial experiences. The Kapingas have had a longer history of European contact than Atamo, and their contact has been more intense. It could be argued that because the Kapingas have interacted more with colonials, and their interaction has been more positive, they have been more willing to accept a dependency relationship with their colonial masters. It could also be argued that Kapingas have been offered so much more than Atamos in the way of material wealth that the Kapingas have been "bought-off." While both these arguments are plausible, I don't think they explain the marked differences in attitudes of people in the two communities.

The U.S. may have "... implemented programs in the 1960s ... designed to make Micronesia dependent on the United States so that the latter could maintain hegemony in the areas" (Kiste, 1974: 197). For the Kapingas, at least, the dependency relationship has been accepted, and they did not appear to be suffering from it in 1971, although this may have changed since that time. Such a relationship would, in my opinion, be unacceptable to Atamos.

This comparison of the attitudes of these two communities sheds some light on the question of whether a dependency orientation is a characteristic of people who became colonized (Mannoni, 1964) or a product of colonialism (Fanon, 1967). In some cases, it may be a product of both, as Ogan (1973)

claims it is for the Nasioi of Bougainville. The comparison presented in this paper would indicate that Pre-European contact populations may have had different attitudes toward dependence before colonial rule.

What are the implications of the attitudes reported here for the political and economic future of Atamo and Kapingamarangi? The disdain Atamos feel for dependence, if it continues, will probably result in a lack of political stability. If this disdain is held by other Papua New Guineans, as I suspect it is, maintaining a unified Papua New Guinea is going to be difficult.

If Kapingamarangi people now feel they can, or ought to, remain dependent on outsiders, they are likely to opt for a continued close association with the United States. For them, the security of their present relationship with the Trust Territory Administration and its relationship with the United States may be more important than greater economic and political autonomy. Whether the Kapingas still feel that security is more important than independence, I do not know. Whether other rural communities in Micronesia also feel that a continued dependence on the United States is acceptable, I cannot say.

One further point bears mentioning. If there is a relationship between a community's attitudes toward political and economic autonomy and the abundance of that community's resources (or at least a stable, ample supply of resources), the future of island nations will probably bring an increasing acceptance of dependence. With the population of Pacific Island nations growing at a very fast rate, the food resources available are going to decline, and the willingness of people to become dependent may increase.

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